

Are we there yet?

Australians' attitudes towards violence against women & gender equality

Summary findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS)

About the NCAS

The National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey, or NCAS, tells us:

- about people's understanding of, and attitudes towards, violence against women;
- about their attitudes towards gender equality;
- what influences their attitudes;
- if there has been a change over time; and
- whether people are prepared to intervene when witnessing abuse or disrespect towards women.

The 2017 NCAS collected information through mobile and landline telephone interviews with a representative sample of 17,500 Australians aged 16 years and over.

The Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) funds the NCAS as part of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (the *National Plan*).¹ The 2017 NCAS is closely aligned with *Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia* (*Change the Story*),² which was developed to support achievement of the *National Plan* goals. The NCAS also complements the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey (PSS), which asks people about their experiences of violence.

The NCAS is the world's longest-running survey of community attitudes towards violence against women. It was initially developed on behalf of the Australian Government in 1995, drawing on an earlier 1987 survey. The last two national surveys took place in 2009 and 2013³ (led by VicHealth). Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) is proud to be leading the 2017 NCAS in collaboration with our research partners.

The NCAS is a resource for anyone wanting to understand and prevent violence against women. It can be used by educators, policymakers, program planners, researchers, journalists and students.

About this summary

This is a summary of the 2017 NCAS results, focusing on the Australian community as a whole.

Findings for young people, those from non-English speaking backgrounds, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are in dedicated reports (to be released early in 2019). Further detailed findings and methodological information about the NCAS can be found on the [ANROWS website](#).



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AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY
to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children

In partnership with



Why survey attitudes to violence against women and gender equality?

Physical and sexual violence against women are prevalent problems with significant health, social and economic costs for women and their children, as well as society as a whole.³⁻⁴ Gender inequality and disrespect of women increase the likelihood of this violence occurring.⁵

There is evidence that violence against women can be prevented before it occurs by addressing the underlying factors that cause the problem.² Prevention action complements but is separate from responses after violence has occurred. However, both forms of action are required to reduce the prevalence of violence over time.

Australian governments have made significant efforts to reduce violence against women and promote gender equality and respect. However, 1 in 4 Australian women have experienced intimate partner violence since the age of 15, and 1 in 5 have experienced sexual violence.⁷ Also, 1 in 6 Australian women have experienced stalking and more than half have experienced sexual harassment.⁸⁻¹⁰

While affecting women across the social spectrum, this violence is either more prevalent and/or more severe and prolonged among young women, women with disabilities and women with limited access to resources such as education, housing, income and employment, as well as among women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, rural and regional and some culturally and linguistically diverse communities.¹¹

Attitudes are shaped by the world around us, including through our families and friends, communities and institutions such as schools and the media.¹² As a reflection of this world, attitudes may serve as a barometer. They are one way of telling us whether progress is being made and where we may need to focus future effort.

Many factors contribute to violence. Attitudes that endorse violence and disrespect towards women and gender inequality are among these factors, as discussed further in this summary.

This summary was led by Violeta Marticorena Politoff and designed by Holly Windle, with art direction by Eleanor Shepherd.

This summary is based on the main 2017 NCAS report: *Australians' attitudes to violence against women and gender equality. Findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes Survey towards Violence against Women Survey* by Webster, K., Diemer, K., Honey, N., Mannix, S., Mickle, J., Morgan, J., Parkes, A., Politoff, V., Powell, A., Stubbs, J. & Ward, A.

Overall findings

Encouraging results



- Most Australians have accurate knowledge of violence against women and do not endorse this violence.
- Most Australians support gender equality and are more likely to support gender equality in 2017 than they were in 2013 and 2009.
- Australians are more likely to understand that violence against women involves more than just physical violence in 2017 than they were in 2013 and 2009.
- Australians are less likely to hold attitudes supportive of violence against women in 2017 than they were in 2013 and 2009.
- There has been improvement in knowledge and attitudes related to 27 of the 36 questions asked in 2013 and again in 2017.
- There has been improvement in knowledge and attitudes related to all but two of the 11 questions asked in the 1995 NCAS and again in 2017.
- If confronted by a male friend verbally abusing his female partner, most respondents say they would be bothered (98%), would act (70%) and would feel they would have the support of all or most of their friends if they did act (69%).

Concerning results



- There continues to be a decline in the number of Australians who understand that men are more likely than women to perpetrate domestic violence.
- A concerning proportion of Australians believe that gender inequality is exaggerated or no longer a problem.
- Among attitudes condoning violence against women, the highest level of agreement was with the idea that women use claims of violence to gain tactical advantage in their relationships with men.
- 1 in 5 Australians would not be bothered if a male friend told a sexist joke about women.

Predictors



The strongest predictors of attitudes supportive of violence against women are people having a low level of support for gender equality and a low level of understanding of the behaviours constituting violence against women (relative to other respondents).^a

a 'High' and 'low' classify respondents relative to one another. It would be wrong to say that any group has a high or low level of support in absolute terms.

The 2017 NCAS questionnaire

The questionnaire from the 2013 survey was redeveloped for 2017, retaining as many questions as possible to measure changes over time. The *NCAS Questionnaire Framework* provides an overview of the questionnaire (page 4).

The core of the survey (represented in the centre cells) involves **components**^b made up of questions designed to find out about people's knowledge of violence against women (25 questions), attitudes towards gender equality (19 questions), attitudes towards violence against women (35 questions and two scenarios) and bystander intentions if witnessing violence or disrespect towards women (two scenarios).

Each component is further divided into **themes**. These reflect different aspects of knowledge and different ways attitudinal support for gender inequality and endorsement of violence against women can be expressed. The main themes are described in greater detail in the box on page 8. The themes in the 'bystander' component (page 4) reflect the conditions known to increase the chances that people will take positive action as bystanders to violence and disrespect.

As well as measuring people's responses to individual questions, selected overall concepts are gauged using 15 **composite measures** (these may be referred to as scales or constructs). These are made up from selected questions using statistical methods to ensure they measure the concept accurately.^c

The first component in the NCAS Framework, the knowledge component has one composite measure that gauges people's overall understanding that violence against women extends beyond physical violence to also include psychological, social and financial means of control and intimidation. There are composite measures to gauge attitudes towards gender equality and violence against women overall, as well as the themes in each of these components. Drawing on questions from the bystander component, there is a composite measure of people's overall intention to take positive action if they witness violence or disrespect towards women.

Many factors influence knowledge and attitudes. Increasing understanding of these factors is an aim of the NCAS. The factors included in the 2017 NCAS are shown in the far left cells in the *NCAS Questionnaire Framework*. Information is collected from survey participants to measure each of these factors. This is then used in the analysis of their responses to the questions in the four core survey components. This includes questions about themselves such as their age, occupation, education and whether they have a disability. Among the new factors measured in the 2017 NCAS are:

- people's levels of prejudice on the basis of other attributes (sexual orientation, Aboriginality, ethnicity and disability);
- their support for violence in general; and
- the gender composition of their friendship networks and workplaces.

How are composite measures used in NCAS?

The strength of a composite measure is that it can measure a complex overall topic or concept (such as support for gender equality) that would be difficult to measure with a single question or even several questions considered separately. These are used in the NCAS to:

- measure overall understanding and attitudinal support more validly.
- measure change in overall concepts over time.
- find out how widely supported particular attitudinal concepts are held, so that greater focus can be placed on more troubling concepts in prevention work.
- explore factors that are related to knowledge, attitudes and action. For example, whether a person's age influences whether they are more likely to endorse gender equality overall.
- explore relationships between concepts (e.g. to find out whether some aspects of attitudes towards gender equality are more strongly related to attitudinal support for violence against women than others).

Note on terminology: Domestic violence, partner violence and violence against women

Many of the questions in the survey use the term **domestic violence** because this is the term used when they were first asked nationally in 1995. The terminology of domestic violence was retained in the questions in which it was used in 2013 to enable the 2017 results to be compared with previous NCAS waves. For accuracy, this term is used in this report when referring to the questions or findings.

The terms **intimate partner violence** and **family violence** are now commonly used in policy and research. Intimate partner violence is used to distinguish violence occurring between people in an intimate relationship and the term family violence to encompass violence between intimate partners, but also to include violence involving other family members (e.g. violence between siblings). The term intimate partner violence is used in this report except when referring to NCAS questions and findings that use the terminology of domestic violence.

The NCAS encompasses four forms of violence: intimate partner violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment and stalking. As these are all forms of **violence against women**, this terminology is used when referring to two or more of these forms of violence.

b The fifth component listed in the *NCAS Questionnaire Framework* 'social norms', was not measured in the 2017 NCAS. Measurement of social norms is subject to future development in the NCAS.

c Composite measures were developed using Rasch and Factor Analysis. Further information can be found in the 2017 NCAS Methodology Report on the [ANROWS website](#).

NCAS Questionnaire Framework

Factors <i>demographic, contextual & attitudinal factors that may be associated with and influence attitudes</i>	Questionnaire components <i>made up of questions in themes</i>	Composite measures <i>made from groups of questions to measure an overall concept</i>
<p>Demographic factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender • Age • Household composition • Education • Labour force status • Occupation of respondent and main household income earner • Postcode • Self-identified disability • Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status • Country of birth of respondent and their mother and father • Year of arrival • Language other than English spoken at home • English language proficiency <p>Contextual factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender make-up of a person's social networks <p>Attitudinal factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prejudice Attitudes Construct (PAC) – Prejudice towards people on the basis of ethnicity, Aboriginality, sexuality and disability • General Violence Construct (GVC) – Support for the use of violence in general 	<p>Knowledge of violence against women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition / nature of the problem • Violence & the law • Patterns & consequences • Contributing factors • Knowledge of resources 	<p>Understanding Violence Against Women Scale (UVAWS)</p>
	<p>Attitudes towards gender equality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undermining women's independence and decision-making in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – public life – private life • Promoting rigid gender roles, stereotypes and expressions • Condoning male peer relations involving aggression & disrespect • Denying gender inequality is a problem 	<p>Gender Equality Attitudes Scale (GEAS) and scale themes</p>
	<p>Attitudes towards violence against women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excusing the perpetrator and holding women responsible • Minimising violence against women • Mistrusting women's reports of violence • Disregarding the need to gain consent 	<p>Community Attitudes Supportive of Violence Against Women Scale (CASVAWS) and scale themes</p>
	<p>Bystander action</p> <p>When witnessing abuse or disrespect towards women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intentions • Confidence • Anticipation of social support 	<p>Intention to Act Construct (ITAC)</p>
	<p>Social norms**</p> <p>Measured by what people think others think or what is expected of them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social norms pertaining to violence against women and gender equality <p><i>** Not measured in the 2017 NCAS. Subject to future development.</i></p>	

Key to symbols across this report

- Positive change between the 2013 and the 2017 NCAS. The difference between these years is statistically significant, $p \leq .01$.
- ^ Difference between men and women is statistically significant, $p \leq .01$.
- * Difference between survey year and 2017 is statistically significant, $p \leq .01$.
- Difference between 2009 and 2013 is statistically significant, $p \leq .01$.
- Question not asked.
- Ω There is a significant difference of less than one percent between 2013 and 2017. This is not apparent in the figure as all values have been rounded.

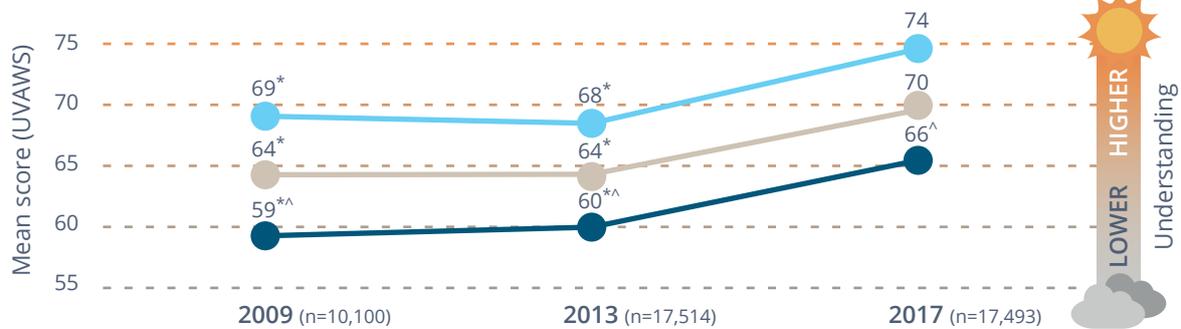
Note: percentages for individual questions may not add to 100% as the small percentage who chose not to answer are not included.

Change in knowledge and attitudes over time

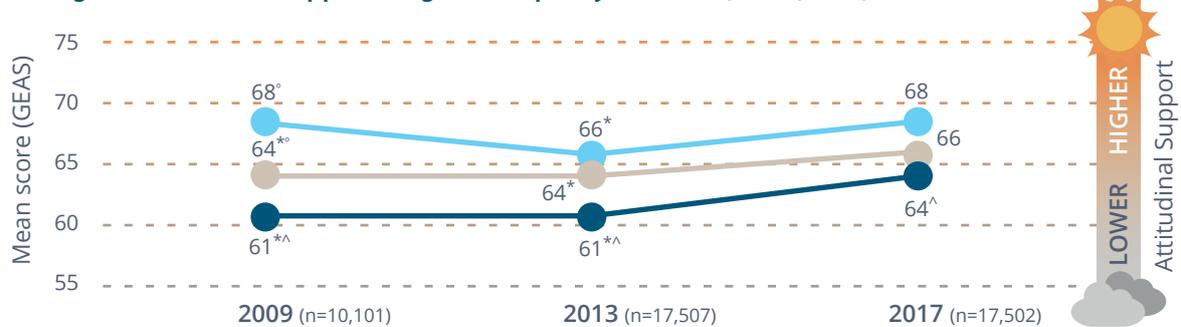
Responses to individual questions show that the majority of Australians have a good understanding of violence against women, support gender equality, reject attitudes supportive of violence against women, and say they would act, or would like to act, when witnessing abuse or disrespect towards women. There was an improvement between 2013 and 2017 on 27 of the 36 questions asked in both survey waves.

To measure change over time at an overall level, statistical modelling was used to account for the fact that not every question was asked in every survey wave. Using the composite measures, each respondent was given a score based on their answers to questions in the composite measures. An average for the Australian population was then calculated. Scores range from 1 to 100.

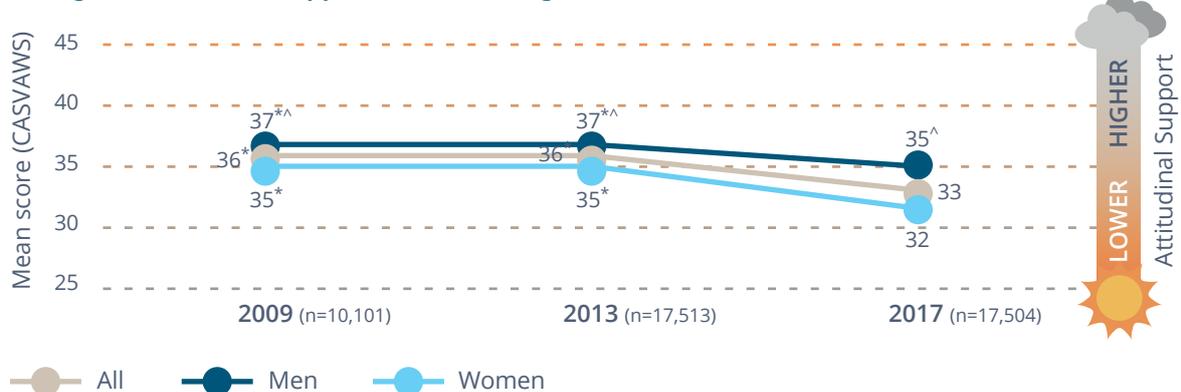
Changes in understanding of violence against women over time, 2009, 2013, 2017



Changes in attitudinal support for gender equality over time, 2009, 2013, 2017



Changes in attitudinal support for violence against women over time, 2009, 2013, 2017



Between 2013 and 2017 there was positive change on all three composite measures.^d

- The average score for Australians on the measure of understanding violence against women increased from 64 to 70 (ranging from 1 to 100, with 100 indicating the highest level of understanding).
- The score for attitudinal support for gender equality increased from 64 to 66 (with 100 indicating the highest level of support for gender equality).
- On the measure of attitudinal support for violence against women, the average score fell from 36 to 33 (this is a positive result with 1 representing the lowest level of endorsement of violence-supportive attitudes).

- Both men and women have improved on all three measures since 2013, however there are gender differences on the three measures. Men have a lower level of understanding of violence against women, a lower level of support for gender equality, and a higher level of attitudinal support for violence against women.

Changing attitudes and improving knowledge takes time. The current results show that Australians' knowledge of, and attitudes towards, violence against women and gender equality are gradually improving. In spite of this progress, there remain areas of concern.

^d As the Intention to Act Construct (ITAC) is new for the current 2017 NCAS, data on change over time are not available.

Knowledge of violence against women

Knowledge of violence against women is among the factors influencing attitudes¹³⁻¹⁵ and is an important resource for both affected individuals and those around them to identify and respond constructively to the problem.¹⁶⁻¹⁷ Knowledge of the

law is important in encouraging individuals to report violence when it occurs and can play a role in shaping positive social norms that take violence seriously.¹⁸

	1995	2009	2013	2017
Understanding that certain behaviours are a form of domestic violence/violence against women (% always, usually or sometimes violence)				
Physical forms of violence				
Slaps or pushes to cause harm or fear	97	97	97* ^Ω	97
Forces the other partner to have sex	94*	97	96	97
Tries to scare/control by threatening to hurt other family members	-	98	97	98
Throws or smashes objects to frighten or threaten	91*	97	96	96
Non-physical forms of violence				
Repeatedly criticises to make partner feel bad or useless	71*	85*	85*	92
Controls social life by preventing partner from seeing family/friends	74*	83*	85*	91
Controls the other partner by denying them money	62*	71*	70*	81
Repeatedly keeps track of location, calls or activities through mobile phone or other devices without consent	-	-	-	84
Stalking by repeatedly following/watching at home/work	-	90*	89*	92
Harassment by repeated emails, text messages	-	85*	85*	90
Knowledge of the prevalence of violence against women (% agree)				
Violence against women is common in our community	-	74	68*	72
Understanding of sexual violence (% agree)				
If a woman doesn't physically resist – even if protesting verbally – then it isn't really rape	-	-	10*	7
Many allegations of sexual assault made by women are false	-	-	-	16
It is a criminal offense for a man to have sex with his wife without her consent	-	-	-	81
Women are more likely to be raped by someone they know than by a stranger	76*	70*	64	64
Knowledge of resources (% agree)				
If I needed to get outside advice or support for someone about a domestic violence issue, I would know where to go	-	62	57*	60

Encouraging results: Knowledge

- The majority of Australians have a good understanding of the problem of violence against women.
- More Australians in 2017 than in 2013 recognise most of the behaviours constituting violence against women.
- There was an 11 percentage point increase between 2013 and 2017 in the number of people who understand that denying a partner access to their money is a form of domestic violence.
- Most Australians (81%) are aware that having non-consensual sex in marriage is illegal.
- Most Australians (72%) are aware that violence against women is common and this is higher than in 2013 (68%).

Concerning results: Knowledge

- Although more Australians are now aware of the many different forms violence against women can take, there is still more work to do to emphasise that it can be more than physical violence.
- There has been an ongoing decline in awareness that men are more likely to commit domestic violence and that women are more likely to suffer physical harm from domestic violence (see page 7).
- 1 in 3 Australians are unaware that a woman is more likely to be sexually assaulted by someone she knows, than by a stranger⁷⁻⁸ (with 18% disagreeing with the question, and 16% responding that they do not know). Awareness of this fact has not improved since 2013, and is lower than in 2009 and 1995. This lack of awareness can lead to undue emphasis on preventing sexual assaults by strangers, rather than the more common problem of assault by someone known to the victim.
- Although most Australians are aware that non-consensual sex in marriage is illegal, 12% mistakenly believe that it is not illegal, and a further 7% did not know.
- 2 in 5 Australians would not know where to get outside help for a domestic violence issue.

Knowledge of the gendered pattern of intimate partner violence

Understanding the patterns of intimate partner violence is important because it reflects knowledge of the nature, severity and dynamics of violence itself. The response to intimate partner violence from someone who believes this form of violence tends to be mutual violence between two people with equal power is likely to be very different to someone who understands that a large proportion of intimate partner

violence involves unequal, gendered power dynamics. As well as impacting individuals' responses to intimate partner violence, this understanding may influence the level of policy attention and resourcing given to address intimate partner violence affecting women, relative to that affecting men. The NCAS asked respondents about their knowledge of the gendered pattern of domestic violence.



Does knowledge reflect the evidence? Who is more likely to commit domestic violence?

THE EVIDENCE

-  **Men** are more likely than women to perpetrate intimate partner violence, and are more likely to use frequent, prolonged and extreme violence.^{7,19-22}
-  **Men** are more likely than women to sexually assault their partner.²³
-  **Men** are more likely than women to subject their partner to controlling and coercive behaviours.²⁴⁻²⁵
-  **Women** are more likely than men to use violence against their partner in self-defence or in response to a loss of control or dignity from ongoing violence or control by their partner.^{21, 26-30}



WHAT AUSTRALIANS BELIEVE

While most Australians (64%) recognise that mainly men, or men more often, commit acts of domestic violence, the percentage who recognise this has **dropped 7 percentage points since the 2013 NCAS**. This decline has been occurring since 1995, when 86% recognised this fact. In 2009, recognition was down to 74% and it dropped a further 3 percentage points to 71% in 2013.



Does knowledge reflect the evidence? Who is more likely to suffer physical harm from domestic violence?

THE EVIDENCE

-  **Women** are more likely than men to suffer physical harm, including injuries requiring medical treatment, time off from work and days in bed.^{20,31}
-  **Women** are more likely than men to be the victims of domestic homicide.³²⁻³³



WHAT AUSTRALIANS BELIEVE

While most Australians (81%) recognise that women are more likely to suffer physical harm from domestic violence, the percentage who recognise this has **dropped 5 percentage points since the 2013 NCAS**. This decline has been occurring since 2009, when 89% recognised this fact. In 2013, recognition was down to 86%.



Does knowledge reflect the evidence? Who is more likely to experience fear from domestic violence?

THE EVIDENCE

-  **Women** are more likely than men to report experiencing fear as a result of violence.^{19,24,34-35}



WHAT AUSTRALIANS BELIEVE

Less than half (49%) of Australians recognise that levels of fear from domestic violence are worse for women, and there has been no statistically significant change since 2013. This is a 6 percentage point decline from 2009, when 55% of respondents recognised that levels of fear are worse for women.

What are violence-supportive attitudes?

These are attitudes that:



Excuse the perpetrator and hold women responsible by shifting responsibility for violence from the perpetrator to the victim by holding women responsible for the violence occurring, or for not preventing it. Attitudes excusing the perpetrator suggest that there are factors that make some men unable to control their behaviour, and that these make the violence excusable.



Disregard the need to gain consent by denying the requirement for sexual relations to be based on the presence and ongoing negotiation of consent. These attitudes rationalise men's failure to actively gain consent as a 'natural' aspect of masculinity (e.g. men's uncontrollable sexual drive), or are based on stereotypes of female sexuality (e.g. that women are passive or submissive in sexual matters).



Minimise violence against women by denying its seriousness, downplaying the impact on the victim or making the violence and its consequences seem less significant or complex than they really are.



Mistrust women's reports of violence by suggesting women lie about or exaggerate reports of violence in order to 'get back at' men or gain tactical advantage in their relationships with men. Such attitudes have been referred to as part of a 'backlash'.

Individuals who hold such attitudes are not necessarily violence prone or would openly condone violence against women. However, when such attitudes are expressed by influential individuals or are held by a large number of people, they can contribute to a culture in which violence is at best not clearly condemned, or at worst, is actively condoned or encouraged.

Attitudes that support violence against women



Attitudes that undermine gender equality

What are attitudes that undermine gender equality?

These are attitudes that:



Undermine women's independence and decision-making in public life by suggesting men make better leaders, decision-makers or are more suited to holding positions of power and responsibility.



Undermine women's independence and decision-making in private life by agreeing that men should have greater authority to make decisions and control in the private realm of intimate relationships, family life and household affairs.



Promote rigid gender roles, stereotypes and expressions by reflecting the idea that men and women are naturally suited to different tasks and responsibilities, and have naturally distinctive – often oppositional – personal characteristics (e.g. 'women are emotional and are therefore better childcarers', while 'men are rational and are therefore better politicians').



Condone male peer relations involving aggression and disrespect towards women by accepting it as normal or harmless for men to encourage negative aspects of masculinity among one another (e.g. aggression and not showing one's feelings) and to talk about women in ways that are sexist and disrespectful (e.g. 'locker room talk').



Deny gender inequality is a problem through denial that gender inequality, sexism or discrimination against women continue to be problems in society. These attitudes often reflect hostility towards women and are sometimes referred to as reflecting a 'backlash' towards women's advancement.

Attitudes to gender inequality

Promoting gender equality is pivotal to reducing violence against women. Gender inequality, and attitudes supporting gender inequality, provide the social conditions in which violence against women is more likely to occur.⁶ This is a position supported by key expert bodies³⁶⁻³⁸ and which underpins both the *National Plan* and *Change the Story*. Monitoring changes in attitudes to gender equality over time is an important way of tracking the conditions that increase the likelihood of violence against women.

Achieving gender equality is also important for other reasons, including its link to the wellbeing of women, men and their families, the protection and promotion of human rights, and its benefits for wider society, including improved productivity, creativity and economic development.³⁹⁻⁴⁰

The aspects of gender equality found to be linked to violence against women have been identified in research compiled for *Change the Story*. NCAS questions to measure these attitudes were selected from existing studies.

	2009	2013	2017
Promoting rigid gender roles, stereotypes and expressions (% agree)			
If a woman earns more than her male partner, it is not good for the relationship	-	-	8
A man should never admit when others have hurt his feelings	-	-	6
When a couple start dating, the woman should not be the one to initiate sex	-	-	10
I think it is embarrassing for a man to have a job that is usually filled by a woman	-	-	6
A woman has to have children to be fulfilled	11*	12*	8
Undermining women's independence and decision-making in public life (% agree)			
In the workplace, men generally make more capable bosses than women	-	-	14
Men, rather than women, should hold positions of responsibility in the community	-	-	10
On the whole, men make better political leaders than women	23*	27*	14
Women are less capable than men of thinking logically	-	-	6
Undermining women's independence and decision-making in private life (% agree)			
Men should take control in relationships and be the head of the household	18	19*	16
Women prefer a man to be in charge of the relationship	27	28*	25
Condoning male peer relations involving aggression and disrespect towards women (% agree)			
I think there's no harm in men making sexist jokes about women when they are among their male friends	-	-	24
I think it's okay for men to joke with their male friends about being violent towards women	-	-	2
I think it's natural for a man to want to appear in control of his partner in front of his male friends	-	-	34
Denying gender inequality is a problem (% agree)			
Many women exaggerate how unequally women are treated in Australia	-	-	40
Many women mistakenly interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist	-	-	50
Many women fail to fully appreciate all that men do for them	-	-	36
Women often flirt with men just to be hurtful	-	-	20
Discrimination against women is no longer a problem in the workplace in Australia	11	13*	10

Encouraging results: Gender equality

- Most Australians agree that both men and women can play a range of roles regardless of their gender.
- There has been a 13 percentage point decrease in the proportion of people believing men make better political leaders than women (from 27% in 2013 to 14% in 2017).
- Nearly all Australians (97%) reject the idea that it is okay for men to joke with their male friends about being violent towards women.

Concerning results: Gender equality

- 1 in 7 Australians do not agree that women are as capable as men in politics and in the workplace.
- Nearly one quarter of Australians see no harm in telling sexist jokes.
- 2 in 5 Australians believe many women exaggerate how unequally women are treated in Australia.
- 1 in 3 think it is natural for a man to want to appear in control of his partner in front of his male friends.

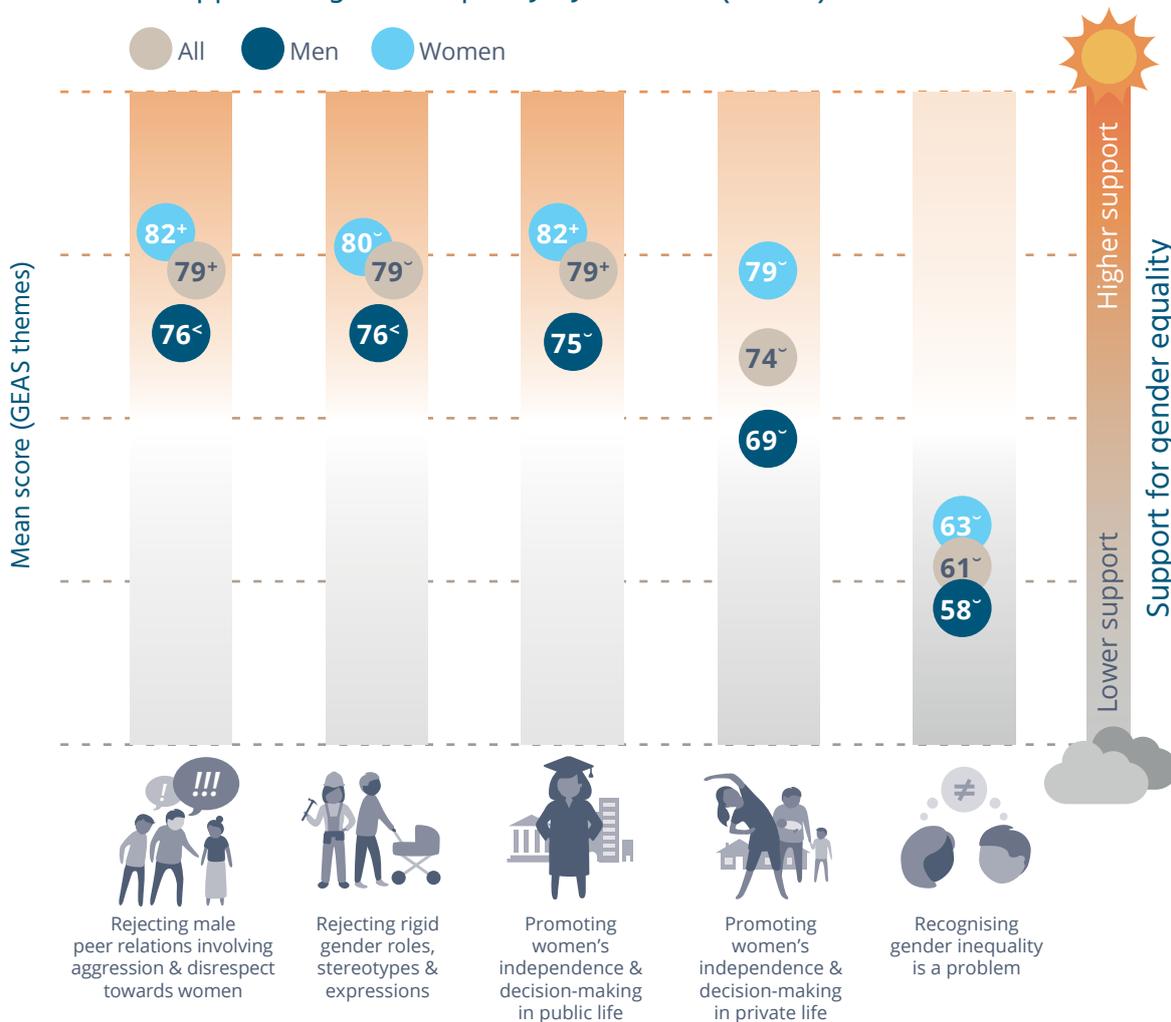
Which aspects of gender equality are most widely supported by Australians?

To find out which aspects of gender equality are more or less likely to be supported by Australians overall, each respondent was given a score based on their answers to questions in each theme. An average for the Australian population was then calculated. The NCAS questions are framed to ask about gender *inequality*, but the scores for the composite measures

have been calculated to indicate the level of support for gender *equality*. Scores range from 1 to 100, with 1 signifying the lowest level of support for gender equality (a negative result).

This information is useful, as it tells us which aspects of attitudes to gender equality most need to be addressed in prevention programs and interventions.

Relative levels of support for gender equality by themes[^] (means)^e



Note: There may be statistically significant differences between values that are less than 1 percentage point. These are not apparent in the figure above due to rounding.

[^] All differences between men and women are statistically significant, $p \leq .01$.

[~] Difference between this theme and all other themes in this sample is statistically significant, $p \leq .01$.

⁺ Difference between this theme and 'rejecting rigid gender roles, stereotypes & expressions', 'promoting women's independence and decision-making in private life', and 'recognising gender inequality is a problem' in this sample is statistically significant, $p \leq .01$.

[<] Difference between this theme and 'promoting women's independence and decision-making in private life', 'promoting women's independence and decision-making in public life', and 'recognising gender inequality is a problem' in this sample is statistically significant, $p \leq .01$.

Key findings

- Among the five themes, Australians are least likely to support the idea that gender inequality is a problem.
- Australians have greater support for women's independence and decision-making in public life than private life (see figure above, definitions on page 8). This finding was confirmed when results for all the gender equality questions concerned with equality in public life were compared with all the questions concerned with gender equality in private life (i.e. not just the questions concerned with decision-making).
- Women tend to have a higher level of support for gender equality across all five themes. This is particularly notable in the difference between men and women in their levels of support for gender equality in the private sphere.

^e The data used in this figure are means, not percentages. They rank the themes relative to one another, rather than showing an absolute level of attitudinal support for each theme in the population.

Attitudes to violence against women

As explained, attitudes can be used to monitor progress. Attitudes may also contribute to violence against women indirectly because they influence social norms or expectations of what is acceptable behaviour. These expectations in turn influence behaviour itself.¹³ In this way, community attitudes can influence how professionals respond to violence against women, as well as the responses of neighbours, friends, family members and work colleagues. Holding violence-supportive attitudes can influence whether women experiencing violence seek help. Such attitudes may be adopted by men who use violence to excuse their behaviour.

The four themes in this component have been formed by synthesising hundreds of prior studies on attitudes towards violence against women, selecting groups of questions that reflect them, and then confirming through the NCAS that they reflect the way the Australian public thinks about violence against women.

	1995	2009	2013	2017
Excusing the perpetrator and holding women responsible (% agree)				
Attitudes excusing the perpetrator and holding women responsible for abuse or managing its consequences				
A lot of what is called domestic violence is really just a normal reaction to day-to-day stress and frustration	-	-	-	20
Domestic violence can be excused if it results from people getting so angry that they temporarily lose control	-	20*	22*	12
Domestic violence can be excused if the violent person was themselves abused as a child	-	-	12*	8
Domestic violence can be excused if, afterwards, the violent person genuinely regrets what they have done	-	25*	21*	14
Sometimes a woman can make a man so angry that he hits her when he didn't mean to	-	-	-	21
Women who flirt all the time are somewhat to blame if their partner gets jealous and hits them	-	-	-	14
Attitudes concerning the family and intimate partner violence				
Domestic violence is a private matter to be handled in the family	18*	14	17*	12
It's a woman's duty to stay in a violent relationship in order to keep the family together	-	8*	9*	4
The role of alcohol or other drugs in excusing the perpetrator or holding women responsible				
Domestic violence can be excused if the victim is heavily affected by alcohol	-	9*	11*	5
Domestic violence can be excused if the offender is heavily affected by alcohol	-	8*	9*	5
A man is less responsible for rape if he is drunk or affected by drugs at the time	-	8	9	8
If a woman is raped while she is drunk or affected by drugs she is at least partly responsible	-	18*	19*	13
Minimising violence against women (% agree)				
Minimising the impacts and consequences of recurring intimate partner violence				
A female victim who does not leave an abusive partner is partly responsible for the abuse continuing	-	-	-	32
I don't believe it's as hard as people say it is for women to leave an abusive relationship	-	-	-	16
If a woman keeps going back to her abusive partner then the violence can't be very serious	-	-	-	12
It's acceptable for police to give lower priority to domestic violence cases they've attended many times before	-	-	-	12
Women who stay in abusive relationships should be entitled to less help from counselling and support services than women who end the relationship	-	-	-	11
In domestic situations where one partner is physically violent towards the other it is entirely reasonable for the violent person to be made to leave the family home	-	90*	89	87
Minimising sexual violence by claiming that women lie				
If a woman claims to have been sexually assaulted but has no other physical injuries she probably shouldn't be taken too seriously	-	-	-	6
Women who wait weeks or months to report sexual harassment are probably lying	-	-	-	9
Women who wait weeks or months to report sexual assault are probably lying	-	-	-	11

Table continued overleaf

Minimising violence against women by placing it beyond the law

Women who are sexually harassed should sort it out themselves rather than report it	20*	13*	12*	7
In my opinion, if a woman reports abuse by her partner to outsiders it is shameful for her family	-	-	-	13
It is a serious problem when a man tries to control his partner by refusing her access to their money	-	-	-	81

Mistrusting women's reports of violence (% agree)

Many women tend to exaggerate the problem of male violence	-	-	-	23
Women going through custody battles often make up or exaggerate claims of domestic violence in order to improve their case	-	51*	53*	43
A lot of times, women who say they were raped had led the man on and then had regrets	-	-	38*	31
It is common for sexual assault accusations to be used as a way of getting back at men	-	-	-	42

Disregarding the need to gain consent (% agree)

Women find it flattering to be persistently pursued, even if they are not interested	-	-	-	23
If a woman sends a nude image to her partner, then she is partly responsible if he shares it without her permission	-	-	-	30
Women often say 'no' when they mean 'yes'	18*	14*	16*	12
Since some women are so sexual in public, it's not surprising that some men think they can touch women without permission	-	-	-	21
If a woman is drunk and starts having sex with a man, but then falls asleep, it is understandable if he continues having sex with her anyway	-	-	-	10
When a man is very sexually aroused, he may not even realise that the woman doesn't want to have sex	-	-	-	28
Rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex	-	35	43*	33

Encouraging results: Attitudes to violence against women



- The majority of Australians reject attitudes supportive of violence against women.
- A small and declining proportion believe that violence can be excused because alcohol is involved.
- A small and declining proportion of Australians agree that intimate partner violence is a private, family matter.
- There is clear public support for intervention policies enabling violent partners to be removed from the home.
- Few Australians believe that women are lying about sexual violence just because they don't report straight away.
- Few people think that women should have to deal with violence on their own.

Concerning results: Attitudes to violence against women



- Too many Australians are willing to excuse violence as part of a 'normal' gender dynamic in a relationship.
- 1 in 5 Australians believe domestic violence is a normal reaction to stress, and that sometimes a woman can make a man so angry he hits her without meaning to.
- 1 in 8 believe that if a woman is raped while she is drunk or affected by drugs she is at least partly responsible.
- 1 in 3 Australians believe that if a woman does not leave her abusive partner then she is responsible for the violence continuing.
- Nearly 1 in 5 Australians do not believe financial control is a serious problem.
- 2 in 5 Australians believe that women make up false reports of sexual assault in order to punish men.
- Many Australians hold attitudes suggesting that sexual aggression can be attributed in part to men's 'natural sex drive' (i.e. 33% of Australians believe that 'rape results from men being unable to control their need for sex' and 28% believe that, when sexually aroused, 'men may be unaware a woman does not want to have sex').

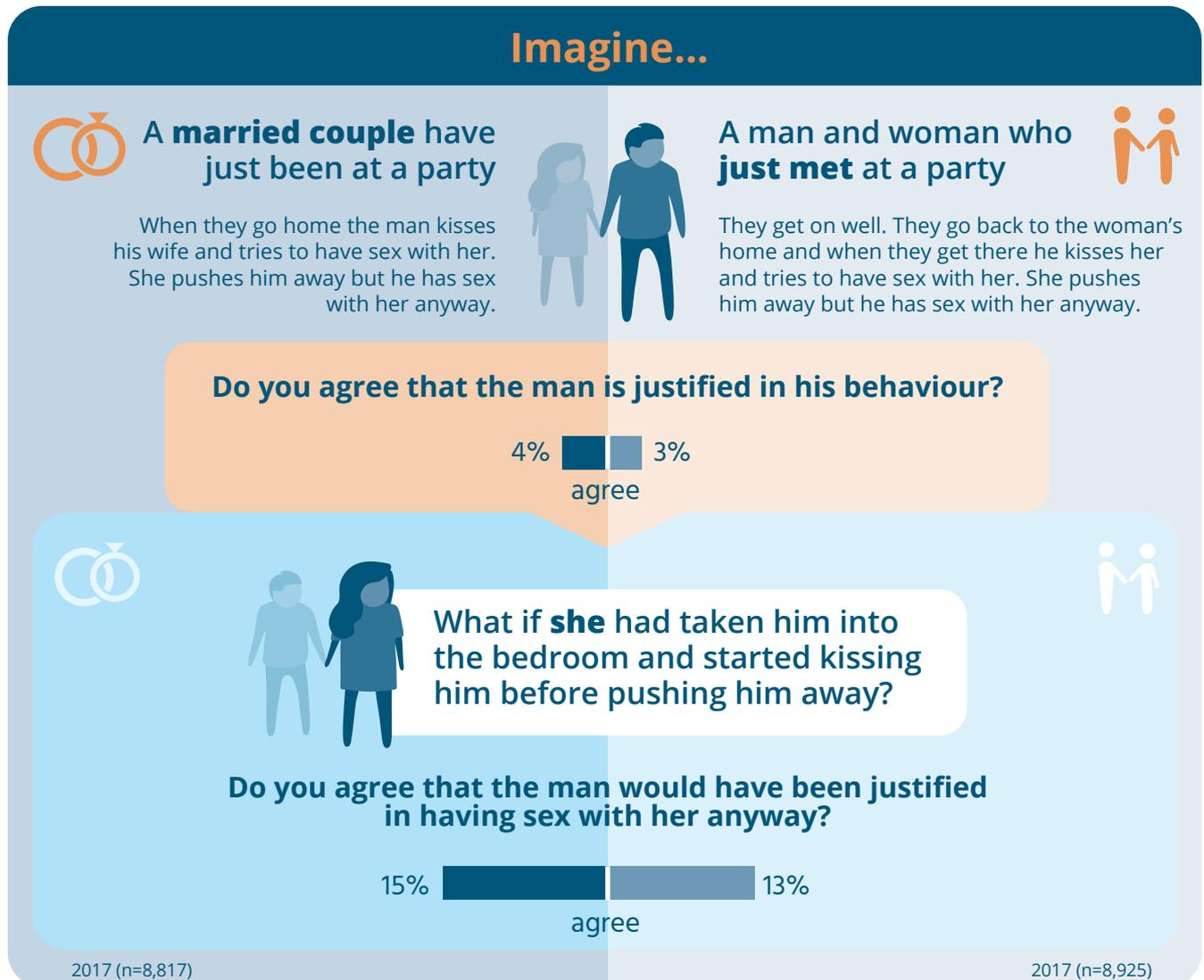
Circumstances in which people justify non-consensual sex

In the 2017 NCAS two scenarios were introduced to investigate whether or not Australians would justify non-consensual sex in different circumstances. Scenarios were used to test two questions:

1) Are Australians more likely to justify non-consensual sex among a married couple (a context in which people sometimes believe women forgo their sexual autonomy), as opposed to people that just met?

2) Are Australians more likely to justify non-consensual sex in a circumstance where a woman had initiated intimacy as opposed to when she did not? This tests the belief that when a woman consents to one element of sexual expression, she is automatically consenting to any further sexual activity.

The scenarios asked respondents to:



Both scenarios describe criminal offences. These findings are significant because they indicate that a concerning proportion of Australians are unclear about what constitutes consent, and the line between consensual sex and coercion.⁴¹⁻⁴² Non-consensual sex can range from rape or coerced sex, to non-consensual acts within an initially consensual sexual encounter. Gendered power dynamics, expectations and stereotypes related to sexuality influence how consent is understood and negotiated (e.g. men are seen as sexually

aggressive, or 'in control', while women are often portrayed as passive or submissive in sexual matters). These dynamics and expectations can contribute to some people failing to see the need to gain consent or to recognise that consent must always be an ongoing and respectful process of negotiation. Ensuring ongoing positive consent is important as people have the right to change their minds, or the situation may change to one where they are no longer comfortable.

Encouraging results: Non-consensual sex scenario

- Few Australians (3-4%) are prepared to justify non-consensual sex, regardless of whether the couple are married or just met.

Concerning results: Non-consensual sex scenario

- Australians are more likely to justify non-consensual sex if the woman initiates intimacy, with 13-15% doing so in this circumstance.

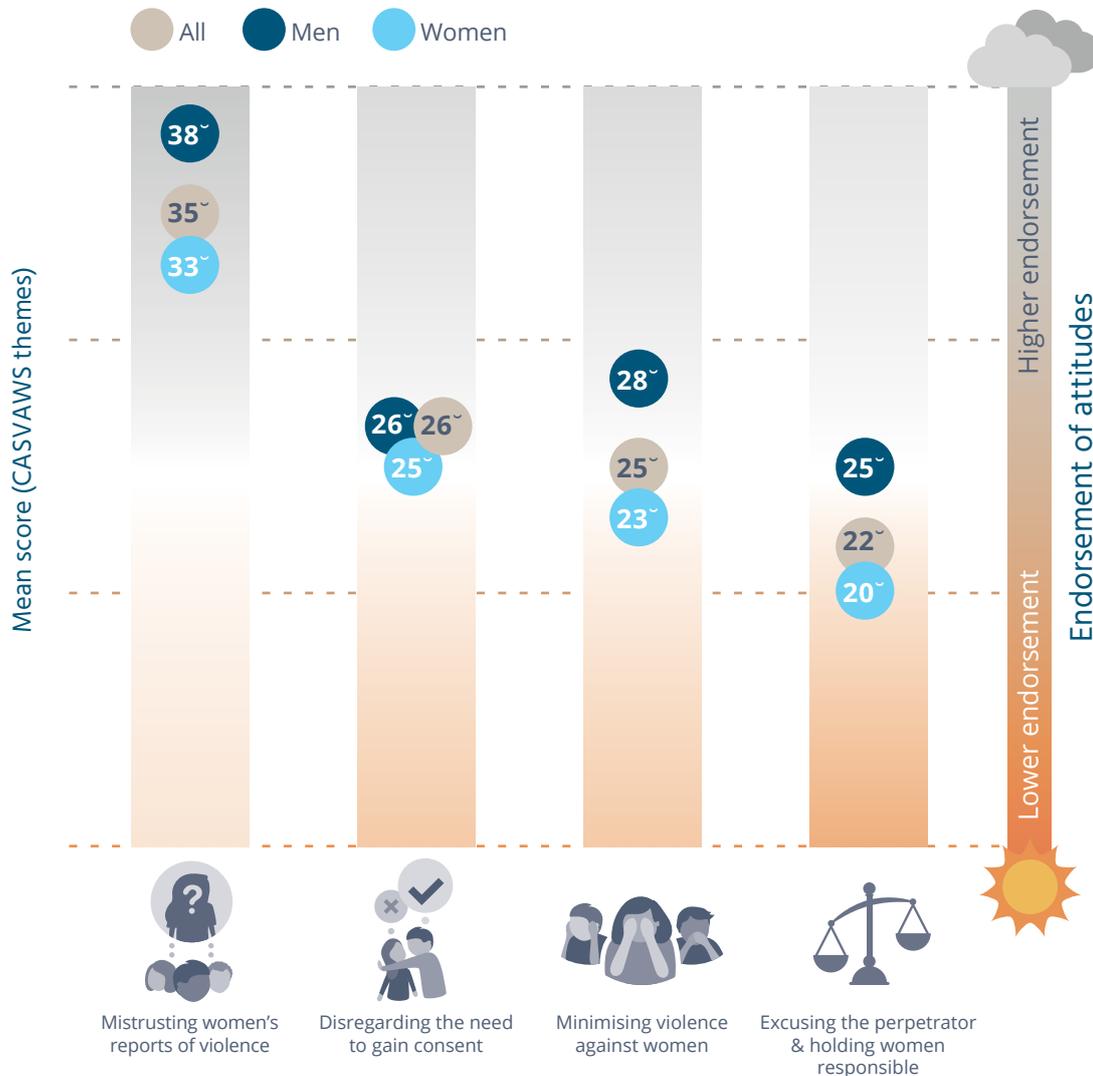
Which aspects of attitudinal support for violence against women are most widely supported by Australians?

To investigate which aspects of attitudinal support for violence against women are more or less likely to be supported by the community overall, an average score for the Australian population was developed for each theme using the same approach as for the gender equality themes (page 10). Scores range from 1 to 100, with 1 signifying the lowest level

of endorsement of attitudes supportive of violence against women (a positive result).

This information is useful, as it tells us which aspects of violence-supportive attitudes most need to be addressed in prevention programs and interventions.

Relative endorsement of attitudes supportive of violence against women by themes[^] (means)^f



[^] All differences between men and women are statistically significant, $p \leq 0.01$.

[~] Difference between this theme and all other themes is statistically significant, $p \leq 0.01$.

Key findings

- Among the four themes, Australians are most likely to support the idea that women's claims of violence cannot be trusted.
- Attitudes disregarding the need to gain consent in sexual relationships are the second most widely held among Australians.
- Men tend to have a higher level of support for attitudes that endorse violence against women across the four themes.

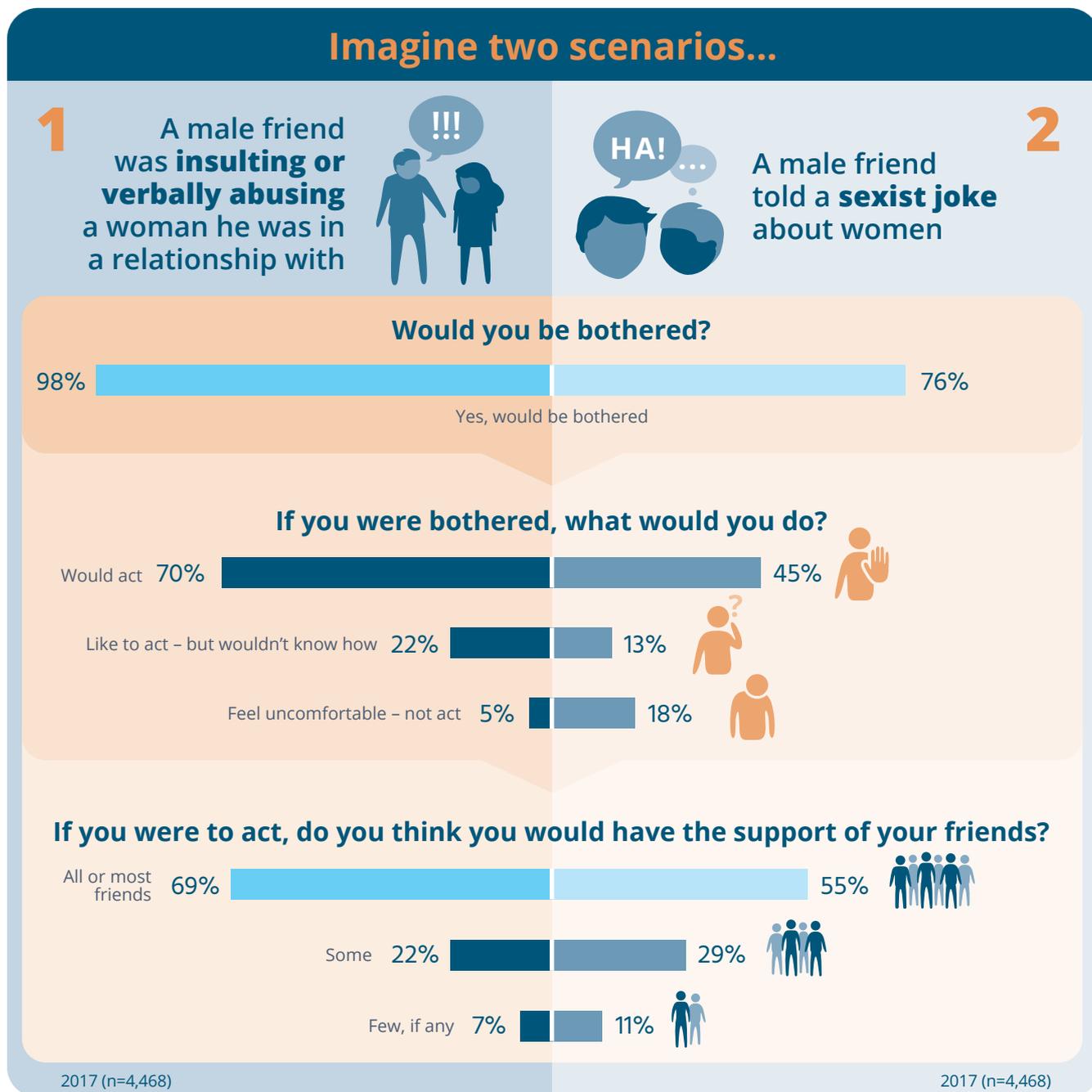
^f The data used in this figure are means, not percentages. They rank the themes relative to one another, rather than showing an absolute level of attitudinal support for each theme in the population.

Bystander action

Encouraging the community to take action in response to witnessing abuse and disrespect towards women has been identified as a promising approach for the prevention of violence against women for a number of reasons. Firstly, only a very small proportion of violence comes to the attention of police and other relevant authorities. Secondly, many of the precursors to violence are not in themselves officially able to

be sanctioned and thirdly, disapproval shown by those around us has been found to be one of the most effective forces to prevent violence against women.¹⁷

The 2017 NCAS included questions on respondents' anticipated responses should they witness two scenarios in a social setting.^g These focus on verbal abuse and disrespect of women rather than physical violence itself.



Encouraging results: Bystander action

- The majority of Australians say they would act or like to act when witnessing abuse or disrespect towards women.
- Nearly all Australians would be bothered if they heard a male friend insulting or verbally abusing his partner.

Concerning results: Bystander action

- Fewer Australians feel bothered when a male friend tells a sexist joke.
- People appear to underestimate the support they are likely to receive from their friends if they act (i.e. more people said they would themselves be bothered than felt they would have the support of all or most of their friends if they acted to express disapproval).

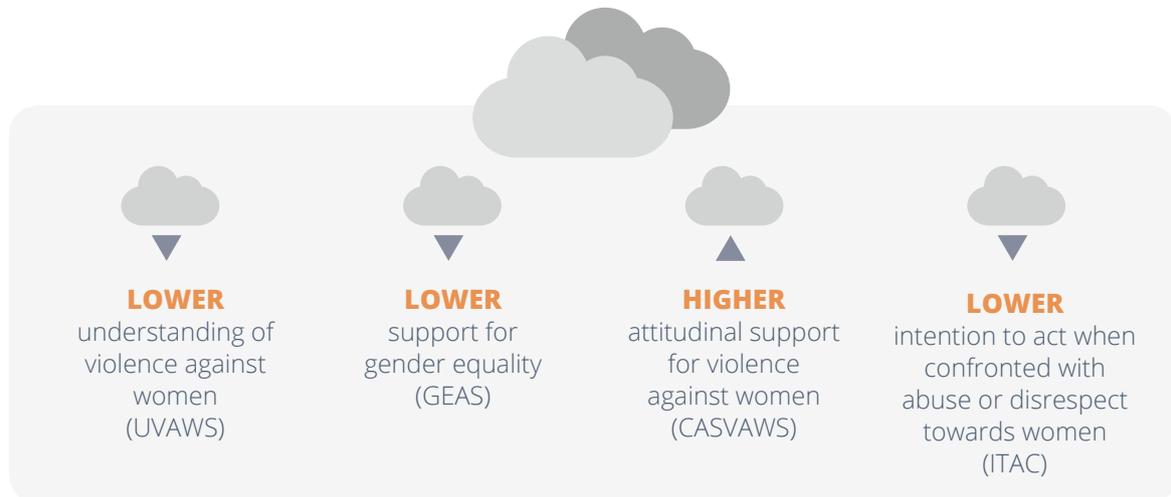
^g Percentages may vary from totals due to rounding and do not add to 100% due to a small proportion of respondents that did not respond to the question.

Demographic factors influencing understanding and attitudes

The previous sections explored knowledge and attitudes in the community as a whole. This section examines differences among particular groups and contexts. This is done by comparing the proportion of people in the higher and lower categories of knowledge and attitudinal support for violence and gender equality. This information is useful as it can help to target efforts to prevent violence against women.

Demographic differences (listed in the *NCAS Questionnaire Framework*) were generally modest and varied across the composite measures.¹

However, those more likely to have either:



Are



People aged 65 years plus



men



people in highly male dominated occupations



people with mainly male friends



people experiencing one or more forms of disadvantage (e.g. low education, living in a disadvantaged area, being unemployed)

¹ 'High' and 'low' classify respondents relative to one another. It would be wrong to say that any group has a high or low level of support in absolute terms.

Predictors of attitudinal support for violence against women

A statistical technique (multiple linear regression analysis) was used to assess which factors measured in the 2017 NCAS were the strongest predictors of attitudinal support for violence against women. This technique measures the strength of influence of each factor after the influence of other factors has been taken into account. All of the demographic, contextual and attitudinal factors in the survey were included in the analysis.

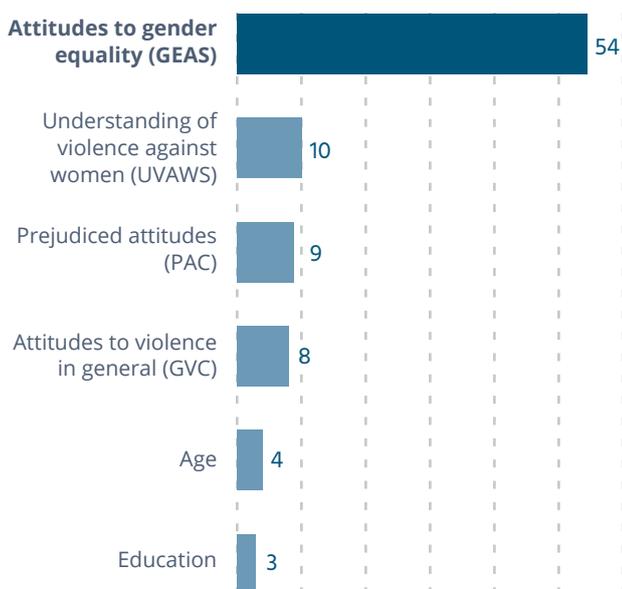
The six strongest predictors of attitudes towards violence against women are in the figure below. Having a low level of support for gender equality is the strongest predictor of attitudinal support for violence, followed by having a low level of understanding of violence against women, holding prejudicial attitudes towards people based on other attributes, and having a high level of support for violence in general. Demographic factors are relatively weaker predictors of attitudes towards both gender equality and violence against women. However, of the demographic factors, age

(being 65 years plus) and education level (not having a tertiary education) are the two strongest demographic predictors of attitudes towards violence against women.

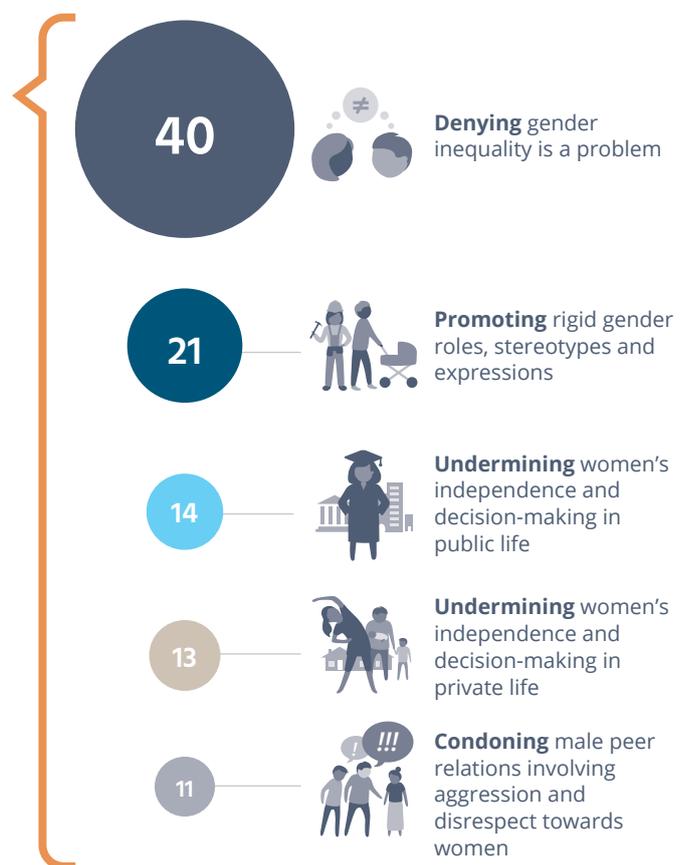
The analysis also investigated the extent to which attitudes to gender equality themes predict whether people hold attitudes supportive of violence against women. Attitudes 'denying gender inequality is a problem' and 'promoting rigid gender roles, stereotypes and expressions' have the first and second strongest influence on attitudes towards violence against women, after the influence of the other themes was taken into account (see figure below).

When investigating which of the gender equality themes most strongly predicts people's intention to act as bystanders, the 2017 NCAS found that attitudes in the theme of 'condoning male peer relations involving aggression and disrespect towards women' are the strongest.

Top 6 predictors of attitudinal support for violenceⁱ



Influence of gender equality themes in predicting attitudinal support for violenceⁱⁱ



Key findings

When the influence of the individual gender equality themes was examined, the themes of 'denying gender inequality is a problem' and 'promoting rigid gender roles' has the strongest influence on attitudes towards violence against women.

ⁱ Figures indicate the percentage of variance explained.

^j Percentages do not equal 100% due to rounding.

The findings: Factors to keep in mind

The 2017 NCAS survey was developed, implemented and analysed using rigorous, well accepted methods and procedures. It has a large sample size and includes both mobile and landline interviewing. This helps ensure the sample is as diverse and representative as possible. As a periodic survey, the NCAS is able to measure changes in knowledge and attitudes over time. However, as is the case with all research, the NCAS has some limitations, as follows:

- It is not possible to reach everyone contacted by the randomly generated telephone numbers. Approximately half (49%) of those reached agreed to participate. The technical term for this is the 'cooperation rate'. The response rate is a more exacting standard and takes into account all randomly generated numbers that were called and could have resulted in an interview.^k That is, it includes all numbers that were never answered, not just those where someone answered. The response rate for NCAS was 17 percent. This is comparable, if not better than, other similar surveys across the world. Response rates are challenging to interpret in a rapidly changing telecommunications era where many people screen unknown phone numbers and never answer the calls made. Sample weighting was used to correct the impact of any known imbalances in the sample.
- Well-established statistical modelling was used to investigate some of the more complex questions. As with any statistical modelling, some assumptions were made (e.g. in measuring change over time at the overall level, see page 5).
- Although cognitive testing of the questions was undertaken to be sure they were well understood, responses to surveys on complex social issues can be influenced by language proficiency, or cultural differences. Some people may give an answer based on what they believe is socially acceptable, rather than what they really think.
- When a relationship is found between two variables (e.g. attitudes and education), it is important to be aware that this does not necessarily mean that one causes the other.

More information and methodological details can be found in the NCAS Methodology Report on the [ANROWS website](#).

Are changes in attitudes reflected in a reduction of violence against women?

Data from the Personal Safety Survey (PSS)⁸ on experiences of violence suggest that changes in attitudes have yet to show in reductions in violence itself. This is not unexpected and may be due to a number of factors (these have been drawn from evidence from other studies and are discussed in the main NCAS report):

- the possible masking of any reduction in experience as increasing awareness and understanding of violence (as shown in the NCAS survey) may have resulted in more women who have experienced violence disclosing this in the PSS than was the case in the past;
- that attitudes to gender equality had plateaued in the years prior to the promising 2017 NCAS results. Attitudes to gender equality reflect levels of equality at the population level,⁴³ and this inequality is in turn linked to violence against women.³ The NCAS suggests attitudes to gender equality are now improving. However, it may take some time before this shows in a reduction in violence;
- research from other countries showing that there may be a temporary increase in violence when conditions for women improve (this is sometimes referred to as a 'backlash effect');⁴⁵⁻⁴⁶
- that it takes considerable time to change complex and entrenched human behaviours. As attitudes are among many factors influencing behaviour and do so indirectly,¹³ change in attitudes and behaviour may not necessarily occur at the same time. It is also necessary to consider the impact of other known factors increasing the risk of violence, in particular those involving a negative trend. For example, violent pornography has been linked to a proclivity for perpetrating violence against women.⁴⁶⁻⁴⁷ Use of violent pornography has increased markedly in recent years.⁴⁸⁻⁴⁹

The long term and complex pathways to behavioural change show the need to monitor success using a range of measures – including those that focus on the intermediate conditions necessary to reduce violence. Attitudes are just one of many of these conditions. Others have been outlined in the *National Plan and Counting on change: A guide to prevention monitoring*.⁵⁰

^k The American Association for Public Opinion Research holds the industry standard for calculating response rates and is the formula used for this study. There are four possible AAPOR response rates that can be used to measure the performance of a project. The AAPOR3 calculation is used in the NCAS, consistent with previous years. More information available at: <https://www.aapor.org/>

Implications for policy & practice

Attitudes are one way of measuring progress in addressing the factors leading to violence against women. Positive change in people's understanding of violence against women, attitudes to gender equality and attitudes to violence against women suggests that Australia is 'on-track' to achieving positive changes in these factors. Continued effort is needed to ensure that these changes are ultimately reflected in reductions in violence, and that gains are not lost to negative influences. As a range of factors influence violence against women, not just attitudes, there is a need for a coordinated approach using many different strategies to prevent violence against women.

In prioritising effort to strengthen knowledge, attitudes and bystander intentions, there would be benefits in:

- addressing the gaps in knowledge of violence against women, in particular, information about help-seeking, the gendered nature and dynamics of intimate partner violence, and the greater risk of sexual assault by a known person, compared to sexual assault by a stranger.
- addressing all aspects of gender inequality, with a focus on challenging rigid gender roles and identities and the idea that gender inequality is no longer a problem. The latter is especially important, because, of the five gender equality themes, it is the strongest predictor of attitudes supportive of violence against women.
- a greater focus in prevention programming on achieving gender equality in the private sphere.
- promoting attitudes that foster a mutually respectful approach to consent in sexual relations, and challenging the idea that women use claims of violence to gain tactical advantage.
- addressing barriers to bystander action by informing people that they are likely to be supported by more of their friends than they might think, by strengthening their knowledge and attitudes and by focusing on people who feel uncomfortable and would like to act but say they would not know how.
- addressing attitudes that 'condone male peer relations involving aggression and disrespect of women' to encourage bystander action, as this is the gender equality theme most strongly predicting people's intention to act (especially among men).

The significance of attitudes in themes suggestive of 'backlash' indicate the need to build strategies to address 'backlash' into prevention programs and policy.

The strongest predictors of attitudinal support for violence against women in order of influence are having a low level of support for gender equality, a low understanding of violence against women, holding prejudicial attitudes towards people based on other attributes, and having a high level of support for violence in general. This suggests that these attitudes, and the norms, cultures and practices supporting them, should have greater emphasis in prevention than factors associated with a person's demographic characteristics (e.g. their age or gender). Although the results suggest there would be a benefit in increasing access to higher education.

The influence of attitudes to gender equality on attitudes to violence against women supports the recommendation of expert bodies that a gender transformative approach to preventing violence against women is needed.⁵¹ The approach is one that promotes equal and respectful relationships between men and women as a key to reducing this violence. There are likely to be benefits in integrating means to address other forms of prejudice and discrimination into prevention efforts, as well as challenging the use of violence as a practice.

The fact that there were relatively **small differences between people based on their demographic characteristics** suggests the need for prevention strategies that reach the whole population. However, the survey does show some grounds for targeting to:

- men and boys;
- men and women in male dominated workplaces and social networks;
- older people; and
- people with a low level of education and/or experiencing other forms of disadvantage.

Of course, people's knowledge, attitudes and bystander intentions are not the only factors linked to violence against women, and therefore are not the only rationale for targeting. Other criteria are necessary to determine where to target prevention effort, such as whether violence against women is more prevalent in a particular group, or whether a group is affected by other conditions linked to violence against women.

There is a **need for further research**, in particular qualitative research, to better understand why certain attitudes are held or are changing. Longitudinal designs would help to foster understanding of factors influencing knowledge and attitudes. Many other research questions could be explored using the NCAS data base.

There is also **scope to improve NCAS's capacity to meet its aims**. People's behaviour is strongly influenced by their beliefs about what they believe is expected of them. Referred to as social norms, these could be measured in future surveys. Other possibilities include questions to assess:

- the wider community's attitudes towards violence and inequality affecting particular groups of women, such as young women or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women;
- the influence of other factors on attitudes (e.g. people's media consumption habits and preferences or measures of social cohesion); and
- attitudes within and towards particular organisational contexts such as sporting clubs, schools or universities.

The NCAS findings provide some cause for optimism, although certainly not for complacency. Although knowledge and attitudes are tracking in the direction of positive change, there are areas investigated in the NCAS that raise cause for concern. The findings in this report will be useful to guide future action to identify and address these areas, with the aim of building cultures of safety, respect and equality for all Australians.

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